



United States Senator  
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REPORTS TO ALABAMA



### EDUCATION GOALS FOR THE 106<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS

In a few weeks, the 106th Congress will begin legislative business. Before the session starts, I want to share with you some of my views on what I believe to be one of the most important issues that Congress will be dealing with - education.

It is my view that, regardless of the particular educational policy or programs we are considering, we must adhere to specific core values in our efforts. Among these, I believe federal programs should serve to enhance parental freedom, involvement and decision making ability. Our policies should put control at the local level, in the hands of parents, teachers and local community leaders. We must recognize that in order to have the very best students, we must have the very best teachers. We must acknowledge that educational excellence can only be achieved in safe, drug-free schools where discipline is stressed and outside distractions are kept to a minimum.

I believe that one of the best ways to empower parents is to provide them with viable options regarding their children's educational path. In support of this goal, I voted for the A+ Education Savings Account Bill which passed the Senate last year. This bill allows parents to contribute money to a savings account and accumulate interest tax free which can then be used to pay for any of a child's educational expenses. Expenditures can be made for items such as private school tuition, computers, special classes, or any other educationally related item that a parent feels would be beneficial to the education of their child. I feel that this type of measure gives parents a greater say in the direction their children's education takes and I am greatly disappointed that President Clinton chose to veto this valuable pro-family educational measure.

One of the surest ways to empower local decision makers is to provide them the funding they need to take action. I believe that the best way to achieve this is to provide federal educational funding in the form of direct block grants to the states. Block granting allows the federal government to return the maximum amount of tax dollars to state and local authorities. The block grant formula removes Washington bureau-

crats, and the overhead they take out of educational spending, from the equation. By reducing this "bureaucrat's cut", we can ensure that funding gets directly to the classroom thereby ensuring the most efficient use of resources. Furthermore, by using block grants we allow the local decision makers the ability to use the money in the manner they see most appropriate. For example, a growing school district can spend block granted funds on more facilities. Another school district, which may have adequate facilities but lacks enough qualified teachers, may choose to use funds to hire more. Getting funds to where they are most needed will in turn lead to better educated students. Ultimately, our investment in education must be geared toward producing better educated students, not better funded bureaucracies.

Well funded, well run schools are an excellent start towards educational achievement. However, they are not enough. In order to produce the best students, our schools must employ the very best teachers. For too long our children have been taught by those who are well versed in the latest education trends and fads but have lacked a basic understanding of the core subjects that they teach. I believe that we need to put teacher testing practices in place that ensure that the teachers in our schools have a firm command of the subject matter that they are teaching. We need teachers who know what they are teaching and how to teach it.

We must confront the fact that our schools can not provide top quality education if they are not safe, and drug-free. Over the last 40 years the type of "problem" activities within schools has changed dramatically. Where talking out of turn and chewing gum in class were once the problems, today, murder, drug abuse, pregnancy, rape and robbery plague our schools. In the past, I have supported legislation that would give school officials the ability to employ the appropriate disciplinary actions required to deal with in-school behavior problems. We can not allow our schools to be taken hostage by a few problem students. When they act up, our teachers should be able to ensure that they do not disrupt the

education of the other students who want to learn.

Lastly, we must work to keep outside distractions to a minimum. In recent years there have been greater and greater efforts to market to school children. Many of America's leading consumer products companies have undertaken campaigns targeting K-12 aged children and using their schools as the conduit for their efforts. Channel One, a 12 minute "news" show that includes 10 minutes of current events and two minutes of commercials, is in over 12,000 schools across the country. The schools broadcast the programming, which very much resembles the M-TV format, to the students everyday during school hours. These outside educationally irrelevant influences waste our children's time and taxpayer money. I believe that our kids need more time with the "Three R's," not more time with Nintendo ads, Pepsi commercials and educationally dubious infomercial style programming. The more we trivialize the subject of our children's education, the more we reduce the likelihood of our children's achievement. Because of this growing problem, I am working toward having Congressional hearings regarding the subject of commercialism in our nation's public schools.

We are now at a crossroads and the future of our children and our country is at stake. In the past, our national educational agenda, the policy decisions we have made and the course we have taken, has not produced desirable results. In fact, the Third International Mathematics and Science Study demonstrates this clearly. Our 12th-graders performance is amongst the worst in the developed world. We can not and must not tolerate such poor performance. I believe that it is time to commit to a new philosophical approach to education - one that stresses the primacy of parental control, the necessity of parental involvement, and that focuses on the fundamental importance of the educational basics. This approach demands the best quality teachers, and places the decision making power at the local level and in the hands of parents, teachers and community leaders.